

# THE TENNESSEAN

## Survey says Spring Hill residents want to shop local Economic development group hails new retail recruiting tools

BY JILL CECIL WIERSMA • THE TENNESSEAN • JANUARY 20, 2010

The city has a few new tools to help it attract more business and industry.

It ranked third on a national list for recession-resistant, high-growth areas in 2009. Also, a recently completed community survey indicates that most residents already shop three times or more a week in the city and are eager for more ways to stay in Spring Hill.

"It's great timing in terms of what we are trying to do," said Dustin Dunbar, chairman of the city's [Economic Development Commission](#).

"This just added fuel, added momentum, to what we are trying to do in attracting new business," he said.

Little Rock, Ark.-based firm the Gadberry Group recently announced Spring Hill as a newcomer to its list, which it provides along with other location intelligence services to top retail brands worldwide. It noted that the number of households in Spring Hill increased by 183 percent between 2000 and 2009.



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Sara Pappas loads shopping bags into the back of her minivan at Super Target in The Crossings of Spring Hill in 2008. A new survey says that more than three quarters of Spring Hill residents shop in town at least three times per week. (Jeanne Reasonover / The Tennessean)

"When they see this information and check us out, it's nothing but good news," Dunbar said of Gadberry's clients.

### Survey serves as a tool for business recruitment

In addition to the Gadberry list, city officials hope to leverage a recent community survey to shop for businesses it wants to bring to Spring Hill.

More than 500 people participated in the online survey, which notes that 77.9 percent of those surveyed shop three times or more a week in the city. A third of the respondents shop here five times or more.

Nearly all — 98.1 percent — are shopping locally for groceries, while 87.4 percent shop at home and garden stores, 73.7 percent shop for clothing and 29.6 percent for electronics.

Residents asked for an array of new items and services in Spring Hill. The top 15 suggestions made up 80 percent of the responses. Top among those were a movie theater (14.8 percent), clothing (9.5 percent), restaurants (8.5 percent), arts and crafts supplies (8.3 percent) and office supplies (5.9 percent).

Dunbar said he takes that information to mean that people like what is here but would like additional choices to spare them trips to other neighboring communities. The survey asked where they go for items/services that are not available in Spring Hill.

Franklin/Cool Springs appears to be the city's biggest competitor, accounting for 71.4 percent of the responses while far fewer people are going to Nashville (9.2 percent), Columbia (9 percent) and Brentwood (6 percent).

Most people surveyed said they feel fairly good about the city's commercial economy. A little more than half, 55.2 percent, described it as moderate, while 22.3 percent said it was good, and 2.4 percent said it was very good. Those who described the local retail climate as poor or very poor — 18 percent and 2.1 percent, respectively — cited empty retail and commercial space, the number of businesses that have closed, the recession and the impact of the GM shutdown.

Despite the recession, 73.5 percent of the respondents said they think the city's commercial district is better than it was two years ago, while 13.5 percent said it is worse and 13 percent said it is about the same.

## **A push is coming**

Dunbar will talk about a new push for economic development at the Spring Hill Chamber of Commerce's luncheon Jan. 28. Mayor Michael Dinwiddie, City Administrator Victor Lay and Chamber Chairman Gary Stephens also will talk about how the city plans to pursue this goal.

Dinwiddie said Spring Hill should be in line for continued growth when the economy improves.

"Cool Springs started out with a mall and empty space and a movie theater and look what exploded around that," he said.

"Now everybody is moving south into Spring Hill. In Spring Hill, we have a Super Target, and if we get a movie theater and if we get some commercial development around Saturn, people are going to start moving south," Dinwiddie said of businesses.

### **GM noted**

Dunbar said the city's placement on the Gadberry list doesn't take into consideration that the local General Motors plant went on standby late last year, but he said the city still has what prospective retailers are looking for in deciding on new locations.

The city should look promising, Dunbar said, noting the 15 percent growth in 2008 and 10 percent growth in 2009.

"Having double-digit growth in a soft economy like that says we have sustainable growth," he said. "It is key to retailers that are looking to expand. It's a perfect opportunity for us to bring more in. We are becoming more of a destination."

The firm also liked Spring Hill's average household income, which grew from \$64,256 in 2000 to \$92,372 in 2009.

"We attribute this growth to a variety of factors including the affordability of new housing and quality of education, along with the convenience in location to employment centers in Nashville and Williamson County," Alderman Jonathan Duda said.

The General Motors plant's future remains unknown and a source of guarded optimism across the city. GM's North American President Mark Russ said last week that plants are at capacity and mentioned the Spring Hill plant, but he stopped short of saying if any plants would be reopened.

Some in Spring Hill, such as Chamber of Commerce Chairman Gary Stephens, say the city has the momentum to keep growing, regardless what happens with the plant. He said the chamber wants to play a more active role in bringing businesses to the city and noted that the Gadberry list is a good thing to help promote Spring Hill.

"That's all good news...," he said of the Gadberry list. "We certainly cannot sit back and wait for GM to go ahead and start up the plant again."